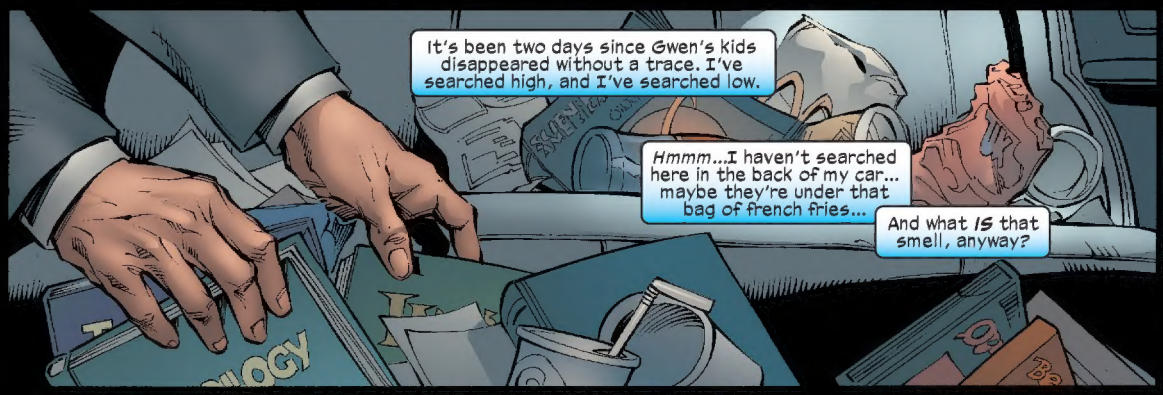
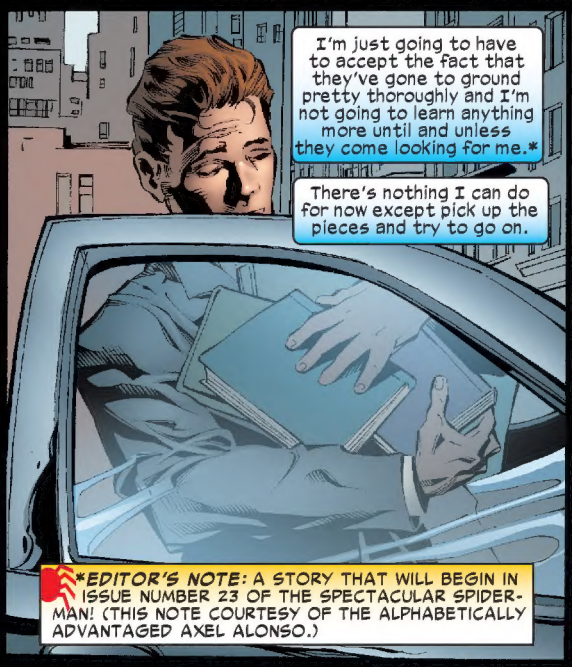
MARVEL
PSR 515
STRACZYNSKI
DEODATO JR
BROOKS
THE AMAZING
SPIDER-MAN
SKIN DEEP
PART 1 of 4





SKIN DEEP

J. MICHAEL STRACZYNSKI — WRITER
MIKE DEODATO — PENCILS
JOE PIMENTEL — INKER
MATT MILLA — COLORIST
VC'S CORY PETIT — LETTERER
WARREN SIMONS — ASSOCIATE EDITOR
AXEL ALONSO — EDITOR
JOE QUESADA — EDITOR IN CHIEF
DAN BUCKLEY — PUBLISHER

FLASHBACK SEQUENCES:
MARK BROOKS — PENCILS
JAIME MENDOZA — INKER
BRIAN REBER — COLORIST

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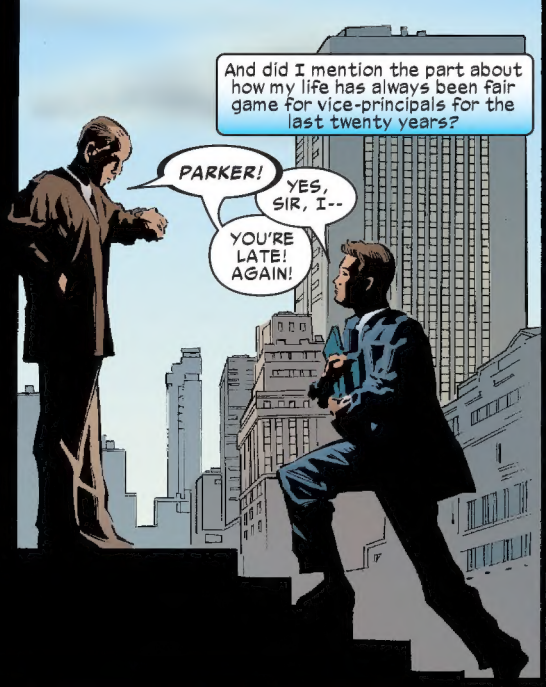
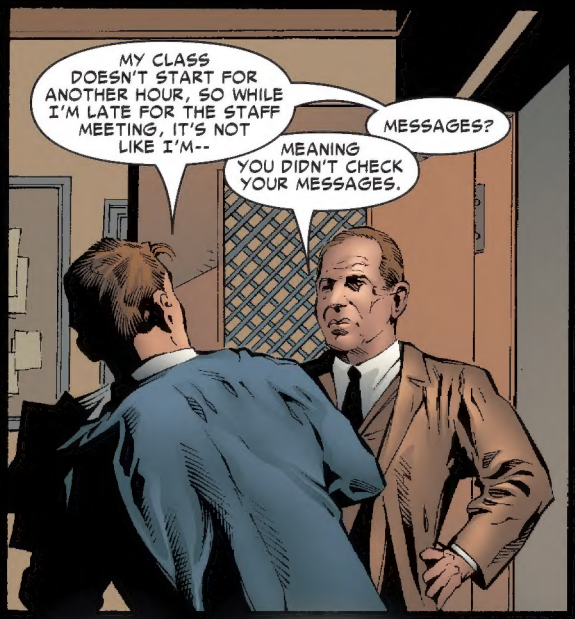
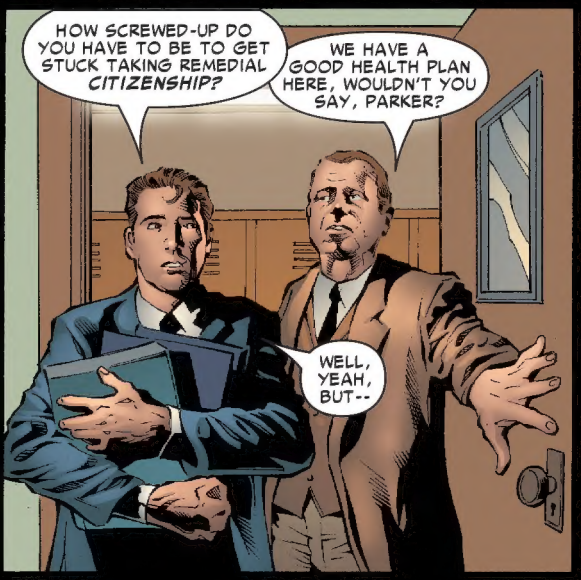

And did I mention the part about how my life has always been fair game for vice-principals for the last twenty years?
PARKER!
YES, SIR, I--
YOU'RE LATE! AGAIN!


MY CLASS DOESN'T START FOR ANOTHER HOUR, SO WHILE I'M LATE FOR THE STAFF MEETING, IT'S NOT LIKE I'M--
MESSAGES?
MEANING YOU DIDN'T CHECK YOUR MESSAGES.

PETER, THE PHONE... AREN'T YOU GOING TO--
BRRRIIIIIG! BRRRIIIIIG!
YOU'RE LATE, I'M LATE, IT CAN WAIT. I'LL CHECK IT LATER. NOW, GIVE ME SOME MORE OF THAT NICE STUFF WITH THE LIPS...
"UHM...NO, I FORGOT. I GOT KIND OF... DISTRACTED."

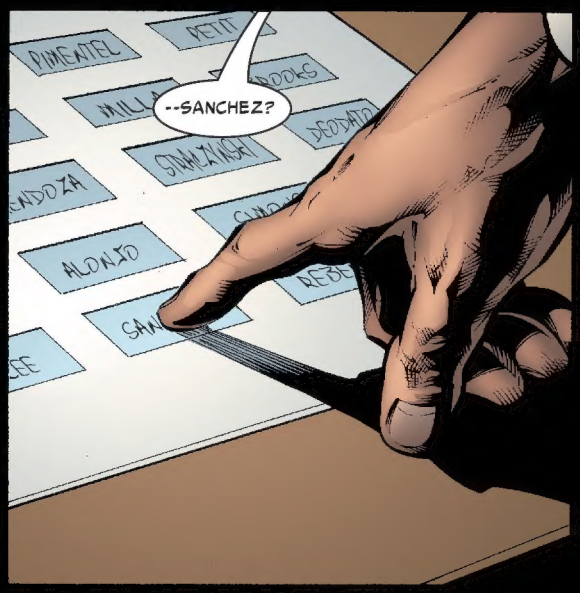
MR. CAVENAUGH CALLED IN SICK, AND WE CAN'T GET A SUBSTITUTE HERE IN TIME. SO WE'LL NEED YOU TO COVER HIS EIGHT-THIRTY CLASS IN REMEDIAL CITIZENSHIP AND SOCIAL STUDIES.
AND SOCIAL STUDIES.
WAIT A MINUTE...REMEDIAL CITIZENSHIP?
WELL, I SUPPOSE I CAN--


HOW SCREWED-UP DO YOU HAVE TO BE TO GET STUCK TAKING REMEDIAL CITIZENSHIP?
WE HAVE A GOOD HEALTH PLAN HERE, WOULDN'T YOU SAY, PARKER?
WELL, YEAH, BUT--

"THEN YOU HAVE NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT, NOW DO YOU?"
SLAM!

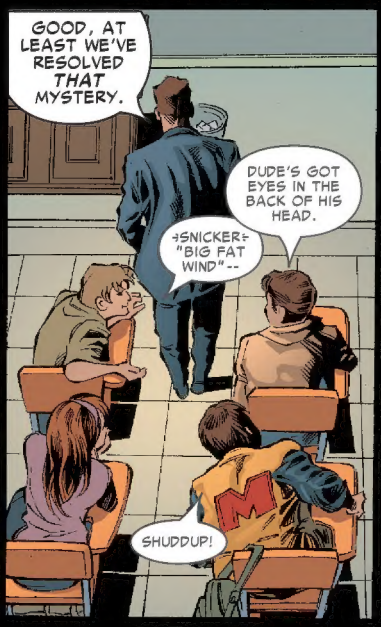
HEY.
SO...
SINCE MR. CAVENAUGH IS OUT SICK TODAY, I'VE BEEN ASKED TO TAKE OVER. MY NAME IS MR. PARKER. I--
YO, MR. PARKER--
--MR. CAVENAUGH ALWAYS SAYS WE CAN GO TO THE LIBRARY TO READ ANY TIME WE WANT 'CAUSE IT ENCOURAGES CITIZENSHIP. SO COULD WE JUST, LIKE...GO?
THE LIBRARY DOESN'T OPEN UNTIL NINE.
YEAH, WELL, Y'KNOW, WE COULD--
NO.
NOW, TO SAVE ME LOOKING THROUGH HIS LESSON PLAN, IF ANYBODY HERE WOULD BE GOOD ENOUGH TO TELL ME WHERE MR. CAVENAUGH LEFT OFF--
--THAT WOULD BE GREAT.
YEAH, I GOT YOUR LESSON PLAN RIGHT HERE.

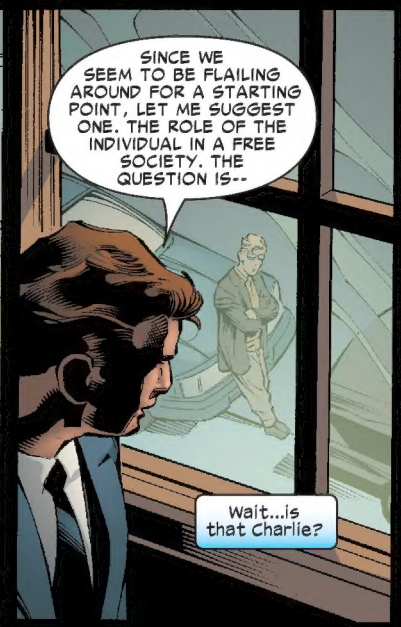
HUH. I'D HEARD THAT A STORM WAS COMING IN, BUT I GUESS IT MUST BE CLOSER THAN THEY THOUGHT. WOULD'VE TAKEN ONE BIG BAG OF WIND TO BLOW THIS THING ALL THE WAY UP HERE.
WOULDN'T YOU AGREE, MISTER--

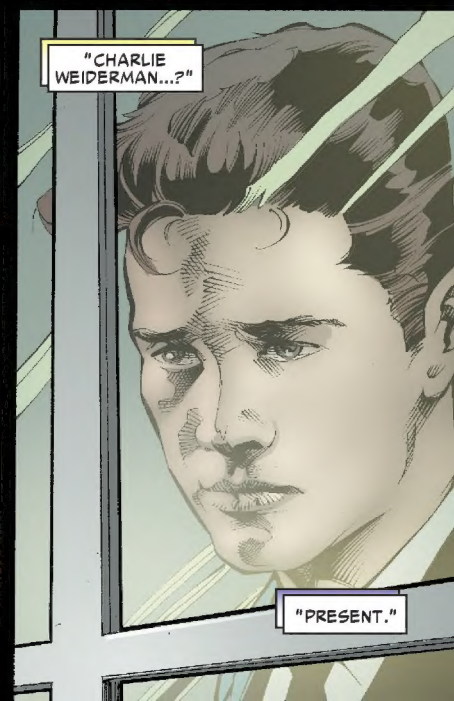

--SANCHEZ?

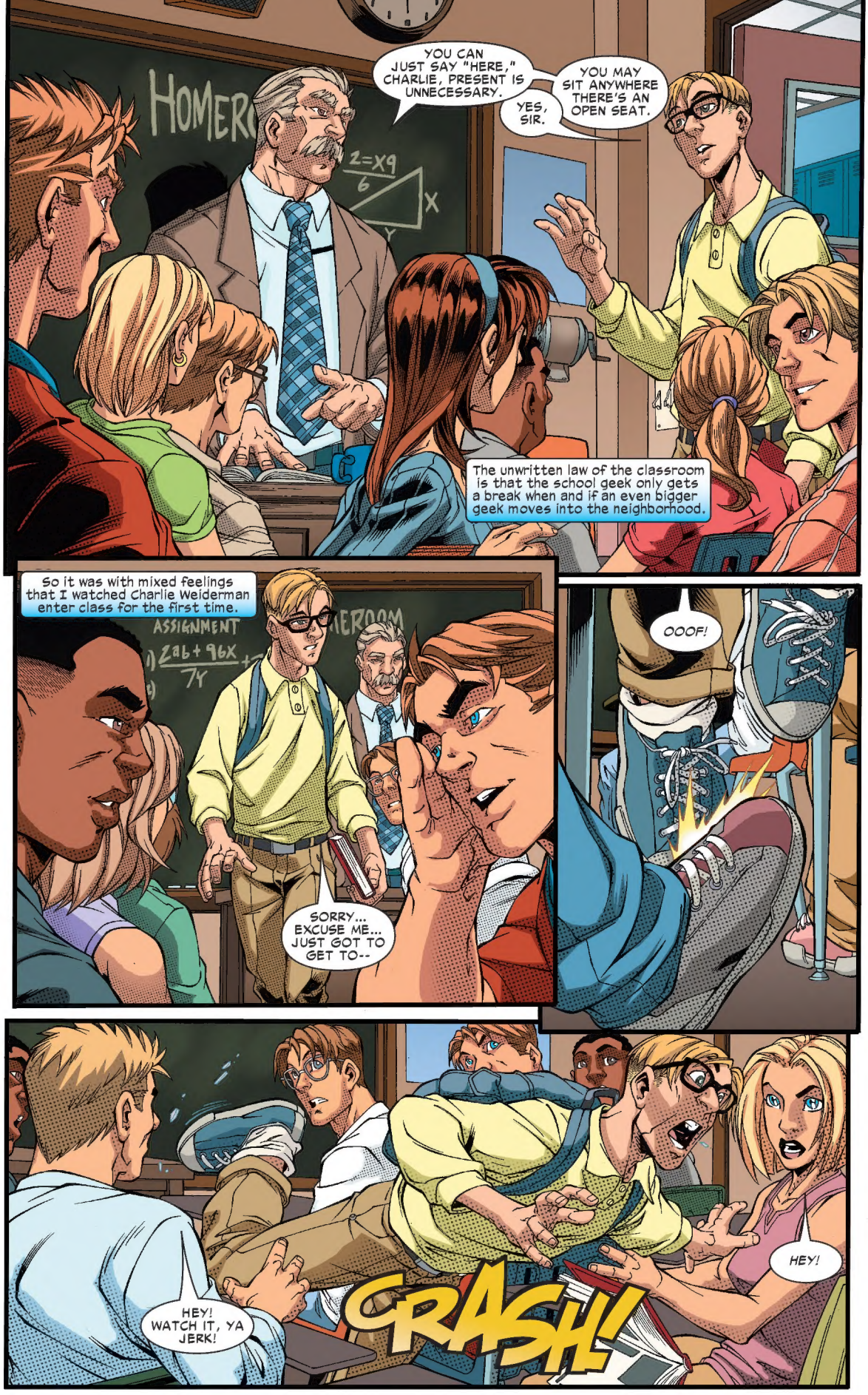
WELL, Y'KNOW, I--
BECAUSE GRAVITY BEING WHAT IT IS, IT EITHER BLEW UP HERE, OR IT WAS THROWN. AND THE PENALTY FOR THROWING ANYTHING AT A TEACHER IS SUSPENSION.
SO WHICH WAS IT, MR. SANCHEZ?

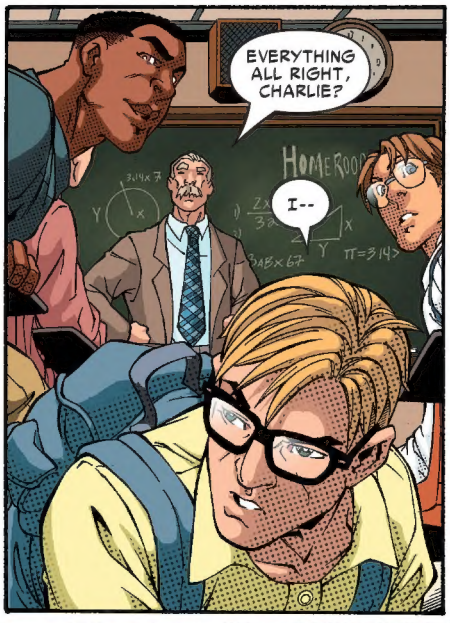
IT, UHM... I GUESS IT BLEW UP.
IT WAS BLOWN.
YEAH.
BY A BIG, FAT WIND.
SURE. WHATEVER.

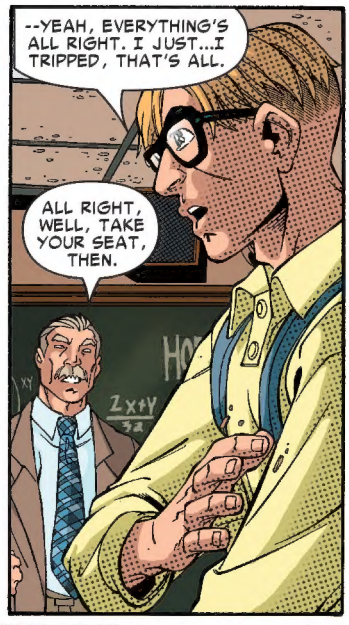

GOOD, AT LEAST WE'VE RESOLVED THAT MYSTERY.
DUDE'S GOT EYES IN THE BACK OF HIS HEAD.
+SNICKER+ "BIG FAT WIND"--
SHUDDUP!


SINCE WE SEEM TO BE FLAILING AROUND FOR A STARTING POINT, LET ME SUGGEST ONE. THE ROLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL IN A FREE SOCIETY. THE QUESTION IS--
Wait...is that Charlie?

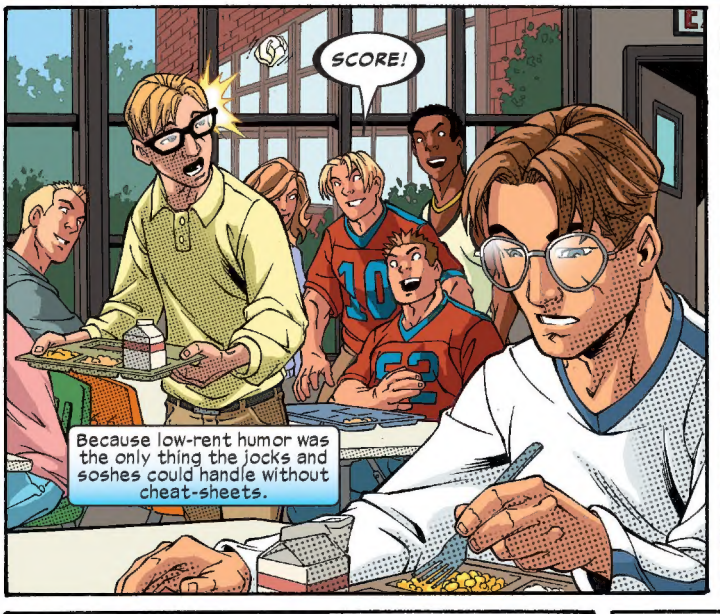

"CHARLIE WEIDERMAN...?"
"PRESENT."

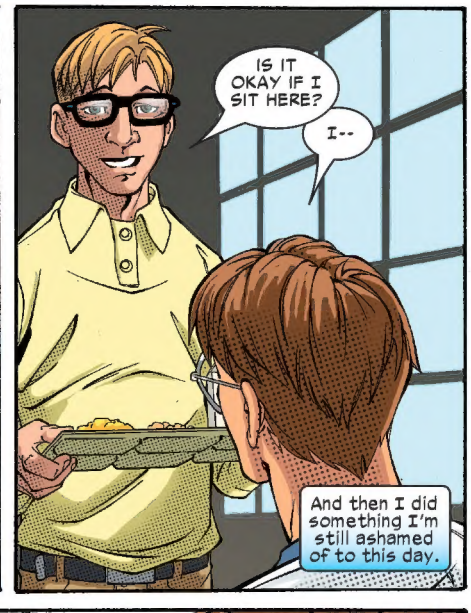

YOU CAN JUST SAY "HERE," CHARLIE, PRESENT IS UNNECESSARY.
YES, SIR.
YOU MAY SIT ANYWHERE THERE'S AN OPEN SEAT.
The unwritten law of the classroom is that the school geek only gets a break when and if an even bigger geek moves into the neighborhood.
So it was with mixed feelings that I watched Charlie Weiderman enter class for the first time.
SORRY... EXCUSE ME... JUST GOT TO GET TO--
OOOF!
HEY! WATCH IT, YA JERK!
CRASH!
HEY!

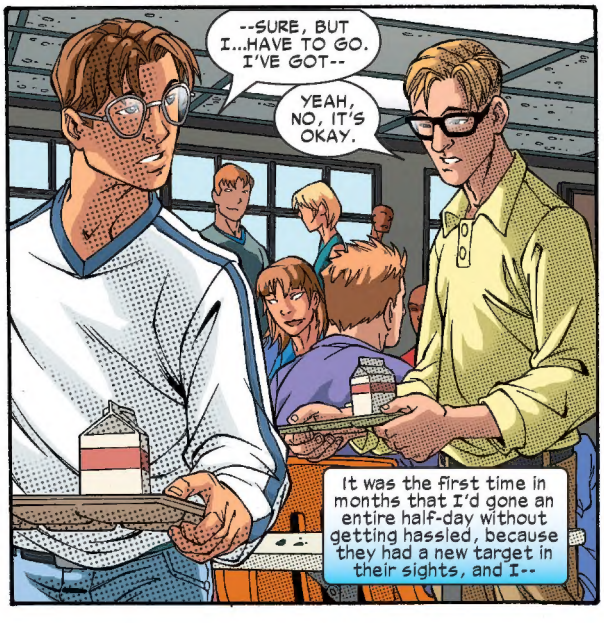

EVERYTHING ALL RIGHT, CHARLIE?
I--

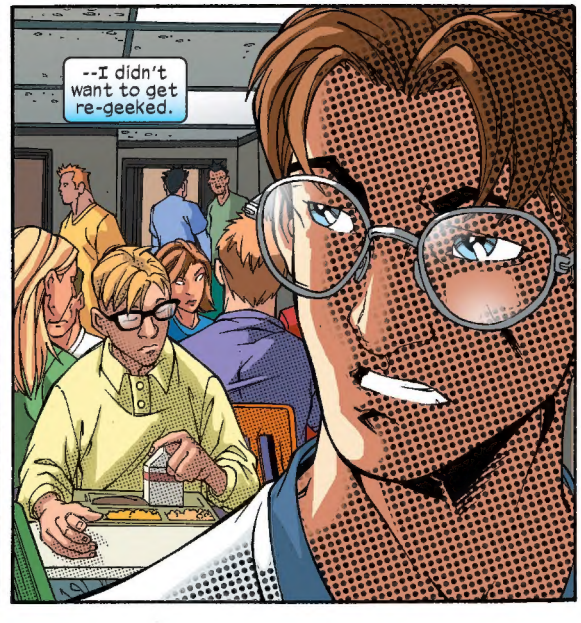

--YEAH, EVERYTHING'S ALL RIGHT. I JUST...I TRIPPED, THAT'S ALL.
ALL RIGHT, WELL, TAKE YOUR SEAT, THEN.

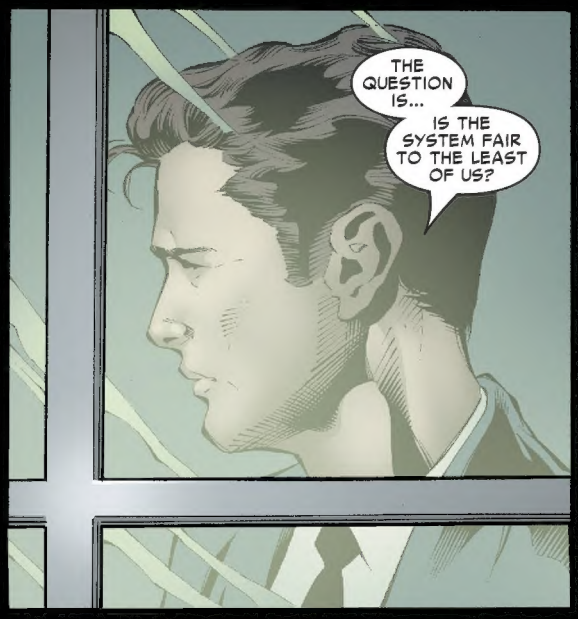
NOW, IF YOU'LL ALL DIRECT YOUR ATTENTION HERE--
WEIDERMAN... MORE LIKE WEINERMAN.
WHINEY-MAN.
The second rule of the classroom is that if you have a name they can turn into a joke, you're in for even more grief.


SCORE!
Because low-rent humor was the only thing the jocks and soshes could handle without cheat-sheets.


IS IT OKAY IF I SIT HERE?
I--
And then I did something I'm still ashamed of to this day.


--SURE, BUT I...HAVE TO GO. I'VE GOT--
YEAH, NO, IT'S OKAY.
It was the first time in months that I'd gone an entire half-day without getting hassled, because they had a new target in their sights, and I--

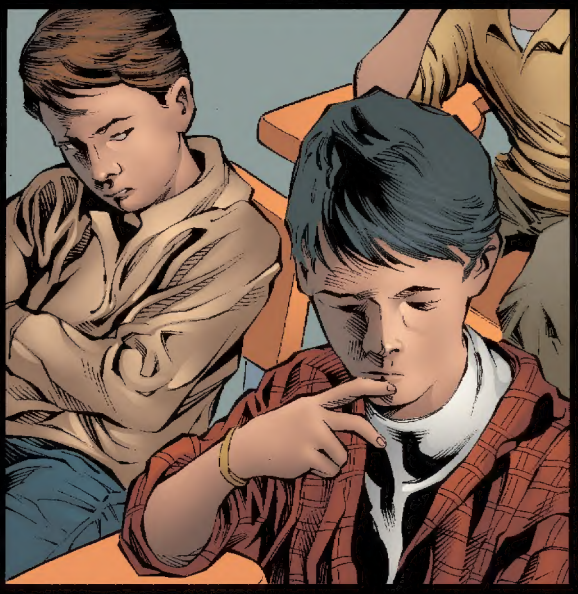

--I didn't want to get re-geeked.


THE QUESTION IS...
IS THE SYSTEM FAIR TO THE LEAST OF US?

I...UHM...I DIDN'T STUDY THIS PART OF--
IT'S NOT A STUDY QUESTION. IT'S A YOU QUESTION. WHAT DO *YOU* THINK? WE KNOW THE SYSTEM WORKS FOR GUYS WITH LOTS OF MONEY, FOR CORPORATIONS, BUT IS IT FAIR TO EVERY-BODY ELSE?
I GET IT, BUT LIKE, WHAT'S THE POINT?

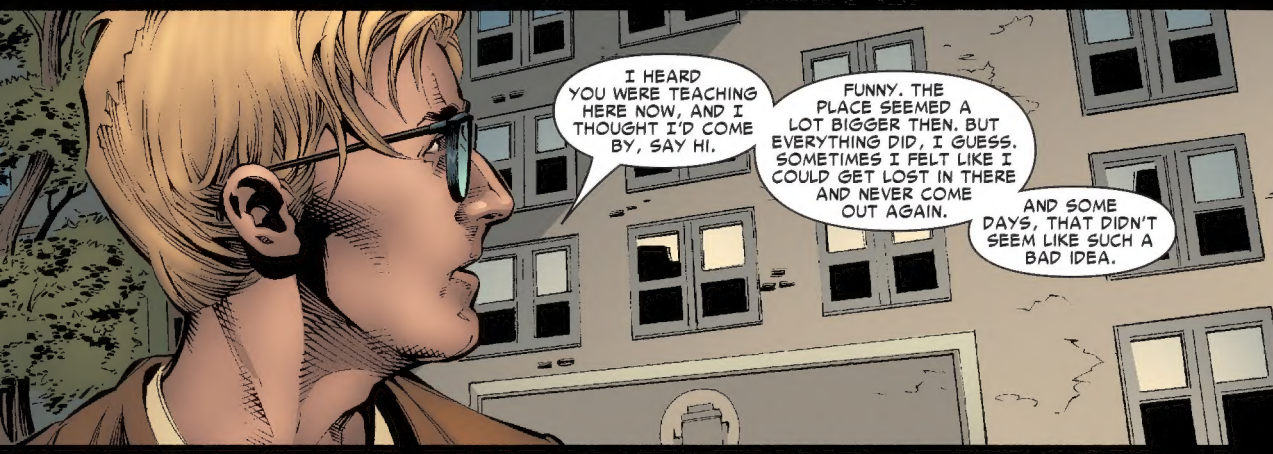
YOU GO TO A BIG IMPORTANT COLLEGE, YOU GOT BIG IMPORTANT FAMILY, YOU GOT MONEY...YOU GOT IT MADE. US, HERE, WHAT'VE WE GOT TO LOOK FORWARD TO?
YOU THINK ANYBODY FROM HERE EVER MADE IT BIG? EVER WENT ANYWHERE?

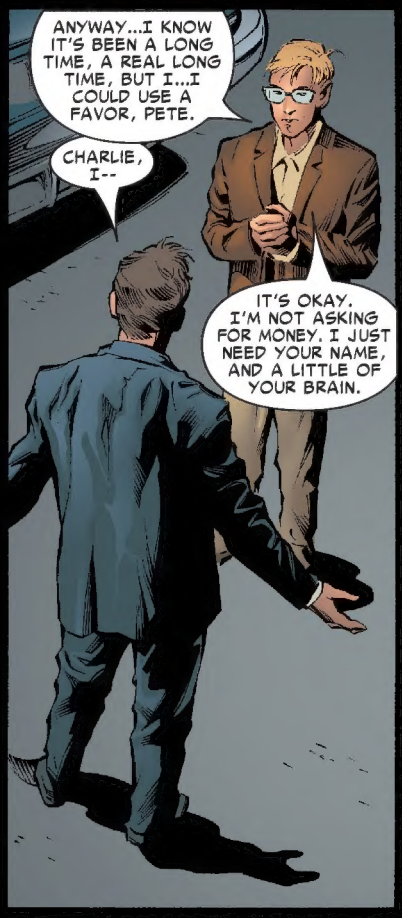
I CAME OUT OF HERE. I GRADUATED FROM THIS VERY HIGH SCHOOL.

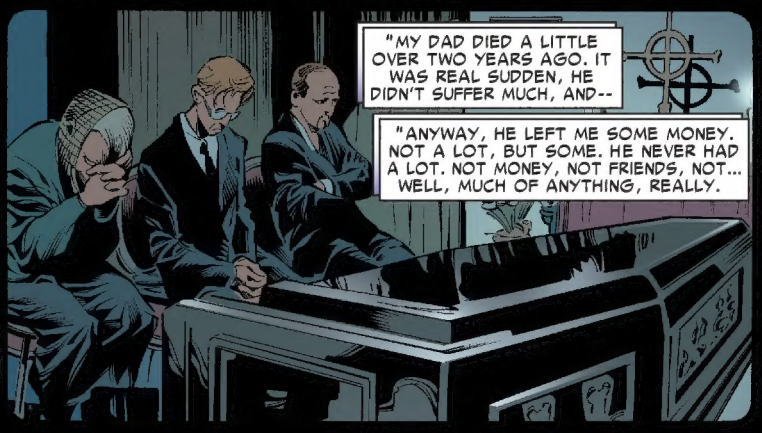


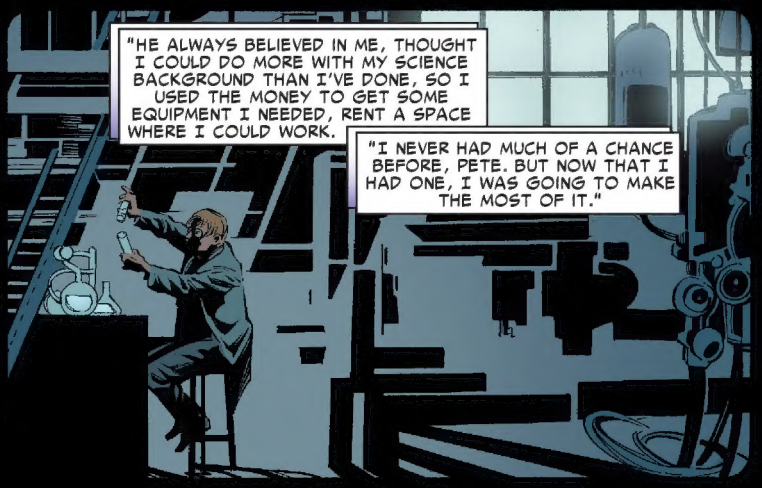
YO, NO DISRESPECT, BUT...I THINK YOU JUST KINDA MADE MY POINT.
Y'KNOW?
"SO...WHAT'RE *YOU* DOING HERE?"

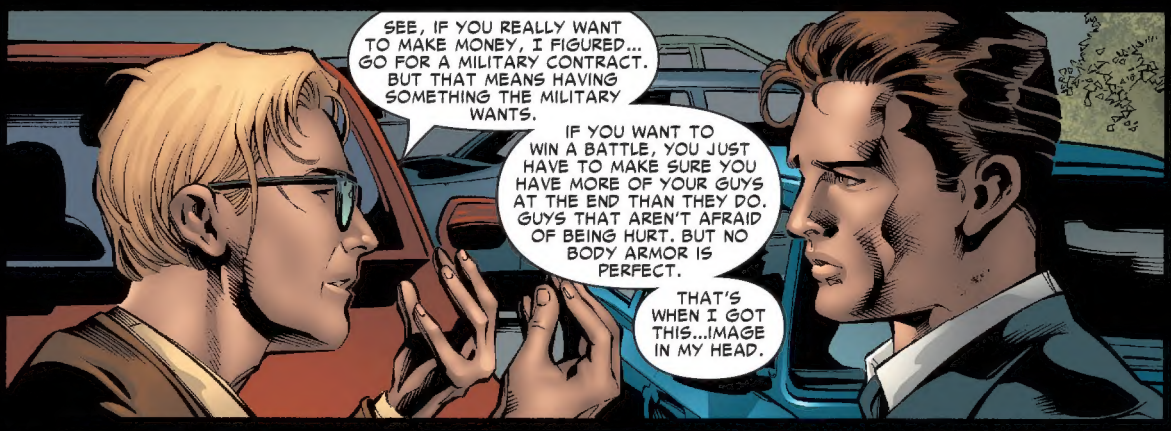
HEY, PETE, YOU RECOGNIZED ME!
YOU'RE KIND OF HARD TO MISS, CHARLIE.
YEAH...YEAH, I GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT.
SO LIKE I SAID, WHAT'RE YOU DOING HERE?


I HEARD YOU WERE TEACHING HERE NOW, AND I THOUGHT I'D COME BY, SAY HI.
FUNNY. THE PLACE SEEMED A LOT BIGGER THEN. BUT EVERYTHING DID, I GUESS. SOMETIMES I FELT LIKE I COULD GET LOST IN THERE AND NEVER COME OUT AGAIN.
AND SOME DAYS, THAT DIDN'T SEEM LIKE SUCH A BAD IDEA.


ANYWAY...I KNOW IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME, A REAL LONG TIME, BUT I...I COULD USE A FAVOR, PETE.
CHARLIE, I--
IT'S OKAY. I'M NOT ASKING FOR MONEY. I JUST NEED YOUR NAME, AND A LITTLE OF YOUR BRAIN.


"MY DAD DIED A LITTLE OVER TWO YEARS AGO. IT WAS REAL SUDDEN, HE DIDN'T SUFFER MUCH, AND--
"ANYWAY, HE LEFT ME SOME MONEY. NOT A LOT, BUT SOME. HE NEVER HAD A LOT. NOT MONEY, NOT FRIENDS, NOT... WELL, MUCH OF ANYTHING, REALLY.


"HE ALWAYS BELIEVED IN ME, THOUGHT I COULD DO MORE WITH MY SCIENCE BACKGROUND THAN I'VE DONE, SO I USED THE MONEY TO GET SOME EQUIPMENT I NEEDED, RENT A SPACE WHERE I COULD WORK.
"I NEVER HAD MUCH OF A CHANCE BEFORE, PETE. BUT NOW THAT I HAD ONE, I WAS GOING TO MAKE THE MOST OF IT."


SEE, IF YOU REALLY WANT TO MAKE MONEY, I FIGURED... GO FOR A MILITARY CONTRACT. BUT THAT MEANS HAVING SOMETHING THE MILITARY WANTS.
IF YOU WANT TO WIN A BATTLE, YOU JUST HAVE TO MAKE SURE YOU HAVE MORE OF YOUR GUYS AT THE END THAN THEY DO. GUYS THAT AREN'T AFRAID OF BEING HURT. BUT NO BODY ARMOR IS PERFECT.
THAT'S WHEN I GOT THIS...IMAGE IN MY HEAD.

"I SAW SOLDIERS GETTING READY TO GO INTO BATTLE, GETTING COVERED HEAD TO TOE IN A SUBSTANCE THAT WOULD MAKE THEM...WELL... FOR ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES...
"INVULNERABLE.

"IMAGINE AN ARMY LIKE THAT. THEY'D BE FEARLESS, NOBODY COULD STOP THEM.
"AS LONG AS THEY KEPT THEIR MOUTHS SHUT WHEN THE BULLETS FLEW.
"AND WATCHED OUT FOR THEIR EYES. I HAVEN'T FIGURED OUT THAT PART YET."

FOR THE BASE, I KNEW I'D NEED SOME KIND OF POROUS POLYMER COMPOUND, SOMETHING THAT COULD COVER EVERYTHING BUT LET OXYGEN THROUGH. BECAUSE IF THEY CAN'T BREATHE--

"--WELL, LET'S JUST SAY THAT WAS THE HARDEST PART TO WORK OUT."

I'VE GOT EVERYTHING WORKED OUT EXCEPT FOR ONE THING. CAN YOU GUESS?
WELL... I--
GO ON.
YOU'D STILL NEED SOMETHING TO ABSORB THE ENERGY OF THE INCOMING BULLETS.
A FLAK JACKET HAS LAYERS THAT ABSORB MOST OF THE IMPACT. BUT WHAT YOU'RE DESCRIBING WOULD HAVE TO BE VERY THIN, ALMOST LIKE A SECOND SKIN.
EXACTLY. BUT I WORKED IT OUT, PETE. I KNOW WHAT I NEED.
VIBRANIUM.
BECAUSE OF ITS PHENOMENAL ABILITY TO ABSORB ENERGY, YOU'D NEED ONLY A SMALL AMOUNT TO PRODUCE ONE THOUSAND METRIC GALLONS OF THE SKINSUITS.
UNFORTUNATELY, VIBRANIUM ONLY COMES FROM WAKANDA, AND IT COSTS...WELL, IT COSTS AN AWFUL LOT MORE THAN I COULD AFFORD WITH--
--WITH A HUNDRED DEAD DADS.
I CAN'T AFFORD--
I TOLD YOU, THIS ISN'T ABOUT MONEY! YOU WORKED AT TRICORP RESEARCH. YOU KNOW PEOPLE... YOU CAN HELP ME WORK OUT THE SYNTHESIS AFTER I GET THE VIBRANIUM AND--
AND HOW ARE YOU GOING TO DO THAT?
I'VE GOT A SHOT AT AN INTERVIEW WITH TONY STARK IF I CAN USE YOU AS A REFERENCE. IF HE INVESTS IN THIS, IN ME, THEN I CAN HANDLE THE REST.
I DON'T KNOW...I'M NOT SURE STARK EVEN KNOWS WHO I AM...I'M SMALL-TIME--
IT'S A CHANCE, PETE, AND THAT'S MORE THAN I'VE EVER HAD BEFORE.
PLEASE.
I...I GUESS I CAN DO IT, BUT--
I KNEW I COULD RELY ON YOU, PETE! I'LL SEND YOU ALL THE DATA I'VE GOT SO FAR, CARE OF YOUR AUNT, SINCE I'VE STILL GOT HER ADDRESS.
I...THAT'S GREAT, CHARLIE, BUT--
I'LL CHECK BACK WITH YOU LATER, I'VE GOTTA GET GOING.
CHARLIE... ONE THING. WHY ME?
YOU'RE KIDDING. WHY YOU?
BECAUSE YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN A GOOD FRIEND TO ME, PETE.
ALWAYS.

The thing about being the school's resident Geek Supreme, especially in the months before my life was changed forever by the bite of a certain irradiated spider, is that you'd give just about anything to make it stop.
OW! C'MON, CUT IT OUT!
HA! GOT HIM!
YEAH, RUN YA LITTLE CREEP!

And if the day comes when the target gets moved off your back because a new one arrives...you'd do almost anything to keep it from finding you again.
AAAAHH!
COME BACK HERE, WEINERMAN! C'MON, SOMEBODY GRAB HIM!
YA RUN LIKE A GIRL, YA SISSY!

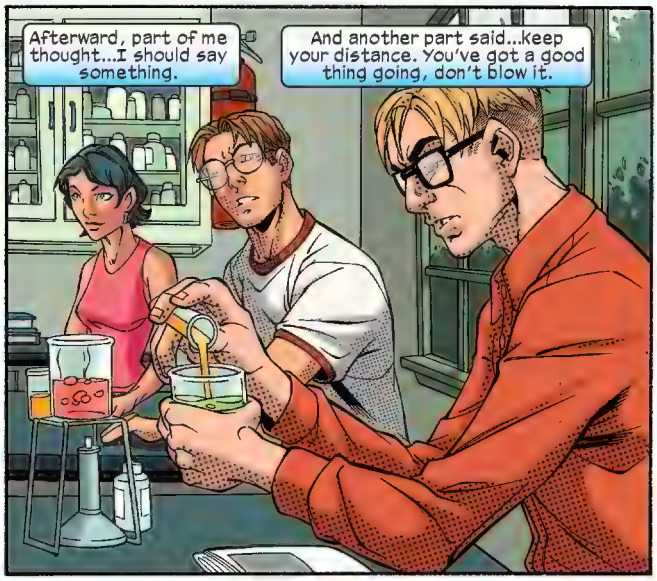
OOOF! OW! GET OFF! GET OFF!
I may have been the proverbial 98-pound weakling, but Charlie was all elbows and awkwardness. Compared to him I was an N.F.L. linebacker.
Well, you know...mostly.

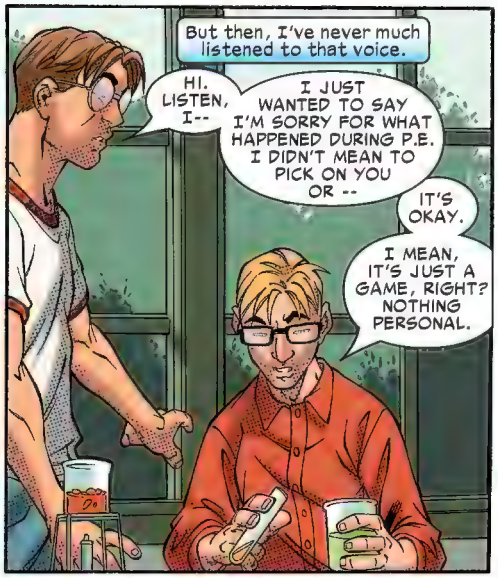
JERK! YOU LET IT GET RIGHT PAST YOU!
He was in the middle of one of those growth spurts, where your feet and hands are bigger than usual and never where they're supposed to be.

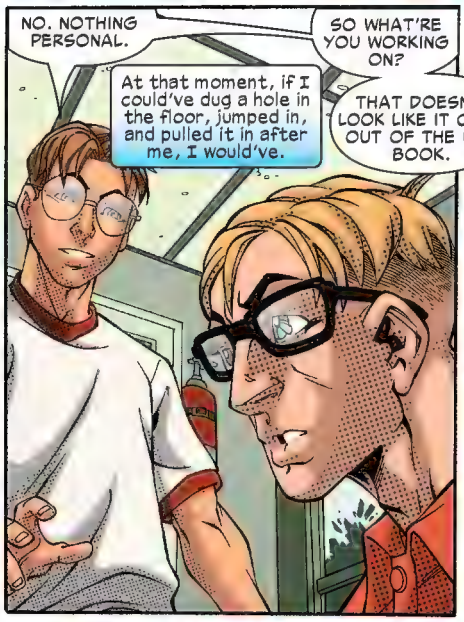
YEAH! GOT IT!
He was so bad nobody really seemed to notice me...and I was totally okay with that.
There are benefits to not being seen.

Then it was my turn to serve in rotation. I could've chosen to serve to anybody on the other side.
C'MON, PARKER... WHAT'RE YOU DOING, WAITING FOR A BUS? HIT IT!
In my heart, I didn't want to do it. I felt sick inside at just the thought of it.
But I did it anyway.
OOOF!
WHOA!
PARKER SMOKED WEINERMAN! EVEN PARKER SMOKED HIM! WAY TO GO!
I got high-fived. Nobody had ever high-fived me before.

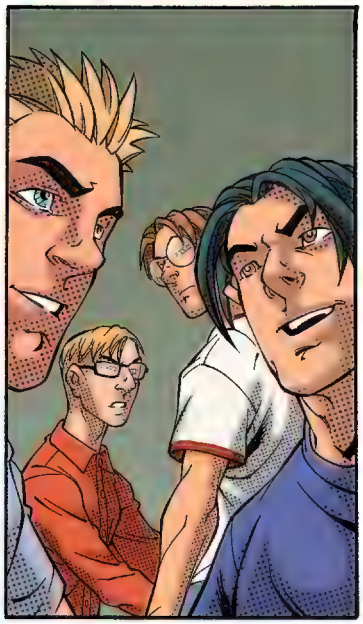
Even though it was in the days before Spider-Sense, I felt like I could find Charlie in my sleep. And I kept at him, earning points in more ways than one.
They say that in a herd, when one of the animals falls sick or behind, it's not the king of the pride that takes it out.
It's always the ones that are almost as bad-off who do the job.
Better thee than me.
I'd never been treated better.
And I'd never felt worse. Or been more ashamed of myself.

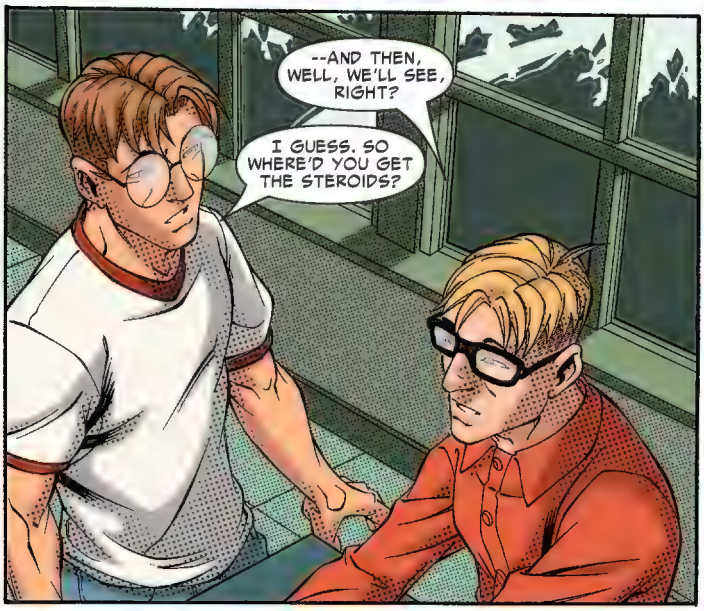

Afterward, part of me thought...I should say something.
And another part said...keep your distance. You've got a good thing going, don't blow it.

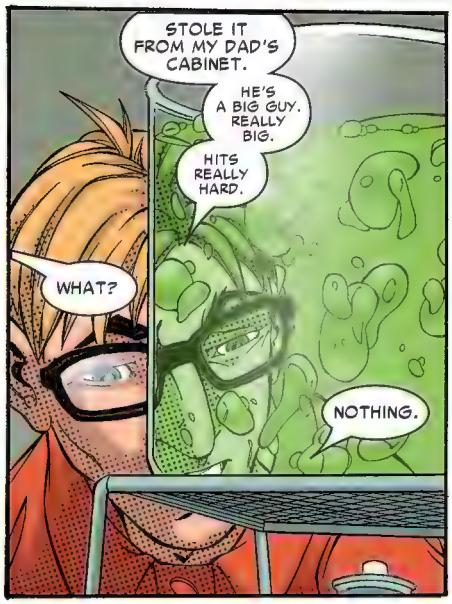

But then, I've never much listened to that voice.
HI. LISTEN, I--
I JUST WANTED TO SAY I'M SORRY FOR WHAT HAPPENED DURING P.E. I DIDN'T MEAN TO PICK ON YOU OR --
IT'S OKAY.
I MEAN, IT'S JUST A GAME, RIGHT? NOTHING PERSONAL.


NO. NOTHING PERSONAL.
SO WHAT'RE YOU WORKING ON?
At that moment, if I could've dug a hole in the floor, jumped in, and pulled it in after me, I would've.
THAT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE IT CAME OUT OF THE LAB BOOK.

IT DIDN'T. I'M WORKING ON A SYNTHESIS OF VITAMINS, STEROIDS, AND A BUNCH OF OTHER STUFF.
YOU KNOW, LIKE CAPTAIN AMERICA. SOMEDAY I'M GOING TO MAKE A SUPER-SOLDIER SERUM, AND THEN--




--AND THEN, WELL, WE'LL SEE, RIGHT?
I GUESS. SO WHERE'D YOU GET THE STEROIDS?


STOLE IT FROM MY DAD'S CABINET.
HE'S A BIG GUY. REALLY BIG.
HITS REALLY HARD.
WHAT?
NOTHING.

Three weeks later, he ended up in the hospital, at the business end of a stomach pump.
They said it was attempted suicide.
Charlie said he thought his serum was ready for a human test, and went for it.
I never pressed it much beyond that. I think I didn't want to know.
After a while, he was well enough to come back to school--
--where they were waiting for him.
They were always waiting for him.

So I gave Charlie the letter. How could I not?
MR. WEIDERMAN? THANK YOU FOR WAITING. I'M TESSA SPRINGFIELD, MR. STARK'S ASSISTANT. HE'S READY TO SEE YOU NOW.
THANKS.
"WELL, MR. WEIDERMAN, YOU COME HIGHLY RECOMMENDED. YOU HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO, BUT THAT'S A GOOD START."
THANK YOU, MR. STARK.
TONY. MR. STARK IS MY FATHER.
VIBRANIUM, EH? YOU ARE AMBITIOUS.
WELL, I--
RELAX. THAT WAS A COMPLIMENT.
ON THE SURFACE, YOUR PROPOSAL SEEMS WELL CONSIDERED.
THANK YOU, I--
BUT I DO HAVE SOME CONCERNS WITH YOUR METHODOLOGY. SOME OF IT SEEMS HURRIED AND NOT WELL RESEARCHED. YOU'RE DEALING WITH SOME VERY VOLATILE COMPOUNDS HERE, CHARLIE.
I AGREE. BUT HAVING COME UP WITH THE BASIC APPROACH, I WANTED TO BE SURE I GOT HERE BEFORE SOMEONE ELSE DID. BECAUSE SOMETIMES IT SEEMS LIKE IT'S JUST THE RIGHT TIME FOR A LOT OF PEOPLE TO DISCOVER SOMETHING. VLADIMIR ZWORKIN, THE ICONOSCOPE TUBE, THE SUITS--
BESIDES, IF I HAD ALL THE MATH WORKED OUT, I WOULDN'T NEED THE GRANT, WOULD I?
A VALID POINT.
I NOTICED THAT ONE OF THE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION CAME FROM PETER PARKER. ARE YOU WORKING TOGETHER ON THIS?
I...NOT PRECISELY, THOUGH HE HAS ADVISED ME ON A FEW THINGS.
WOULD HE BE AN OFFICIAL PART OF THIS PROJECT?
WELL, I... I HADN'T REALLY...
IF YOU THOUGHT IT WOULD HELP.
IT COULDN'T HURT.
THEN HE'LL BE THERE FROM DAY ONE, THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE PROJECT.
SO YOU'RE FAMILIAR WITH HIS WORK?

YOU COULD SAY THAT.
EDITOR'S NOTE: HOW DOES TONY STARK KNOW PETER PARKER IS SPIDER-MAN? SEE NEW AVENGERS #3, OUT THIS JANUARY, TRUE BELIEVER!

I DO KNOW THAT HE HASN'T LENT HIS NAME TO MANY PROJECTS BEFORE THIS ONE... AT LEAST NONE I'VE SEEN... SO THAT CARRIES A FAIR AMOUNT OF WEIGHT.
SO...HOW MUCH MONEY WOULD YOU NEED TO TAKE THIS TO THE NEXT STEP?

WELL, SIR, I--
AND YOU'D MAKE MY LIFE EASIER IF YOU COULD JUST ROUND IT OFF TO THE NEAREST HUNDRED THOUSAND.

I...UHM... YEAH, I CAN DO THAT.
SIR.
I didn't see Charlie for a while after I got the good news. But that was okay.

After all, he had his work to do--

--and I had mine.
Enjoying the nightlife...
...going with MJ to rehearsals...
...great performances...
...lectures on the decline of Western civilization...
...and generally just hanging around.

I should've known everything was going too well for comfort.
JUSTA SEC JUSTA SEC JUSTA SEC--

YEAH?
MR. PARKER, THIS IS MOLLY ST. JUDE, NEW PROJECTS MANAGER AT STARK INDUSTRIES, AND I'M CALLING TO FIND OUT WHEN WE MIGHT GET A PROGRESS REPORT ON THE PROJECT YOU'RE DOING WITH MR. WEIDERMAN.

THE PROJECT--
YES, WE'VE BEEN TRYING TO REACH HIM BY PHONE, BUT HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO GET IN TOUCH WITH HIM. SINCE YOU ARE THE SUPERVISOR OF RECORD ATTACHED TO HIS WORK, WE THOUGHT YOU COULD GIVE US A BRIEFING.
RIGHT...

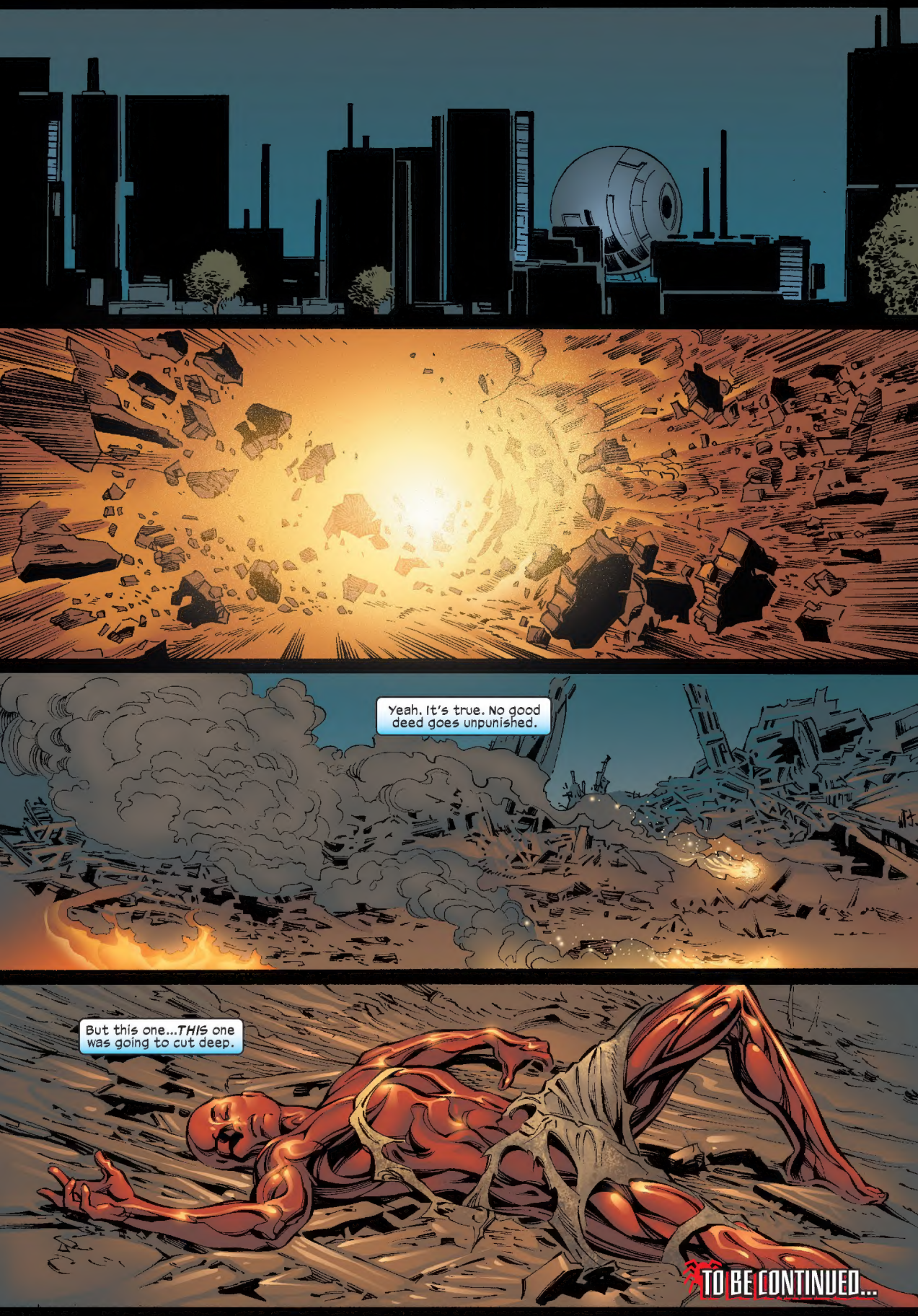
"...WELL, BE ASSURED THAT I'LL DEFINITELY TOUCH...THAT IS, BE IN TOUCH...WITH MR. WEIDERMAN THIS AFTERNOON."

CHARLIE? CHARLIE...?
WHY THE HELL DID YOU TELL STARK I WAS WORKING WITH YOU ON THIS?
YOU DID HELP WITH SOME OF THE EARLY--
I JUST CHECKED SOME OF YOUR FIGURES. THAT'S NOT THE SAME THING.

HE SAID YOUR INVOLVEMENT WAS CRUCIAL TO GETTING THE FUNDING, PETE.
I DON'T CARE, I--
HE GAVE YOU ALL THIS STUFF BECAUSE I WAS...REALLY? HE SAID THAT? BECAUSE THIS IS...Y'KNOW...A LOT OF STUFF. EXPENSIVE STUFF. HECK, IF I'D KNOWN THAT--
PETE--

--I'M AT A CRITICAL PART OF MY WORK. IF YOU TELL THEM THE TRUTH, THEY'LL PULL THE PLUG, AND--
I JUST NEED A LITTLE MORE TIME.
DAMN STRAIGHT.
IS THAT THE VIBRANIUM?
CHARLIE, I TOLD YOU TO HOLD OFF INJECTING THE VIBRANIUM UNTIL YOU'D PERFECTED A STABLE MEDIUM.
I FOUND A SHORTCUT TO GETTING IT READY FOR DISSOLUTION AND INTEGRATION INTO THE SKINSUIT COMPOUND--
CHARLIE, YOU CAN'T SHORTCUT VIBRANIUM! IT'S TOO DANGEROUS!
BUT THERE'S NO OTHER WAY.
THAT'S WHY YOU HAVEN'T BEEN RETURNING ANY OF THE CALLS FROM STARK, ISN'T IT? IF THEY SAW THIS SETUP, THEY'D SHUT YOU DOWN IN A HOT SECOND.
DID THEY CALL YOU? I...WHAT DID YOU TELL THEM?
NOTHING, I WANTED TO SEE WHAT WAS GOING ON HERE FIRST. BUT NOW...GOD, CHARLIE--
DON'T TELL THEM ANYTHING, PETE, NOT UNTIL I'VE FINISHED THE FIRST TEST.
I CAN'T DO THAT. MY NAME IS ON THIS THING--SOMETHING *YOU* DIDN'T TELL *ME*--AND IF THIS GOES UP, YOU COULD TAKE THE WHOLE NEIGHBORHOOD WITH YOU.
THAT WON'T HAPPEN!
YOU CAN'T BE SURE OF THAT!
YOU SAID YOU WERE MY FRIEND!
I *AM* YOUR FRIEND, CHARLIE. I'M TRYING TO SAVE *YOUR* LIFE AND *BOTH* OUR REPUTATIONS.
YOU'VE GOT UNTIL TOMORROW MORNING TO DO THE RIGHT THING. EITHER YOU TELL THEM THE TRUTH...OR I WILL.
AND NEVER, EVER LIE TO ME AGAIN, CHARLIE.
Somebody once said no good deed goes unpunished.
And there are days I'd like to find whoever said that and kick his butt, because that line comes to mind way too often in my life.

If I'd had any common sense, I would have turned Charlie in right then and there. Shut down the whole thing. But I wanted to give him a chance to do the right thing, and save a little of his reputation.
Charlie had a good mind, maybe even a great mind, but he was impatient. Science requires patience. But Charlie required something else.
Validation.
He had something to prove, most of it to people who had forgotten all about him by this point and didn't care one way or another.
He thought he could show them all, prove to them that he was special, that he was SOMEONE--
FFFFFSSSSSSSSSHHHHHHH!
--that he had that...spark.
...NO...


Yeah. It's true. No good deed goes unpunished.
But this one...*THIS* one was going to cut deep.
TO BE CONTINUED...